

CSH Shabbat Service Schedule

December 18 | Vayehi
January 8 | Bo
January 22 | Yitro



Shabbat Candle Lighting Friday, December 17 4:06 pm

Shabbat Morning

9:30 Old Whaler's Church, Sag Harbor

This week's parashat: Vayechi

Annual: Genesis 47:28-50:26 (Etz Hayim, p. 293)

Triennial Cycle: Genesis 47:28--48:22 (Etz Hayim, p. 293)

Haftarah: I Kings 2:1 – 12 (Etz Hayim, p. 313)

Musings on Vayechi -- Chazak, chazak, v'nitchazek

But before leaving the family saga of Bereshit, a few comments on Genesis, or at least the second half, Gen 25-50, as a pair of interlocked Bildungsroman—that is, a kind of biography telling the story of a person's life, from early youth through maturity and to old age, with the focus on the personal challenges encountered and the hero's growth over the course of a lifetime. The cycles of stories of Jacob and Joseph—different as they are—may both be read in this way.

I see the central challenge in Jacob's life as his learning to face his brother as an equal: the turn from deceit, avoidance and flight, as a youth, to meeting Esau man to man, after twenty-two years. From a protected, softish, young man, to a paterfamilias and leader of his clan. All of his tests or the conflicts surrounding him were one on one: Isaac and Rebekkah, himself and Esau, Rachel and Leah, himself vs. Laban, and then again, confronting Esau as an adult.

In both families the parents played favorites, but whereas in the case of Esau and Jacob each parent had their special favorite, creating unbearable tension in the home, in the case of Joseph it was his father who pampered and spoiled him, making him the favorite of all, the center of the constellation of twelve. It is thus hardly surprising that he saw himself as king, as the central axis around which the microcosm of his family was to turn. Thus, for him, what maturity came to mean was not meeting the others as equals, but learning to wield what we would call today political power. He only encounters his brothers again when he is already the second most powerful man in the kingdom. He waxes sentimental, weeping with them when he finally reveals his identity—but he is also clearly their benefactor, and that of their father. His role is that of the worldly-wise brother who helps his "greenhorn" family to become established in the new land, where he knows how things work. Indeed, he doesn't even have to talk to "the right people," because he himself is "the right people."

But in the final analysis, the Bible what is not only a human story, a great family saga— as compelling, and filled with human insight and psychological acumen as it may be—but the book of God and man. And what makes it so powerful is precisely the presence and encounter with God in the fray of all-too-human life. It is, so to speak, the juxtaposition of the vision of the angels coming up and down, and the Divine promise to Jacob that "I will be with you" as he sets off to the unknown, with what comes after—the challenges of a household with two fractious women, the dealings with a wily and dishonest father-in-law, the practical details of animal husbandry. What would Jacob have thought at Beth-el had he known what the next twenty-two years would bring... ?

<http://hitzeiyehonatan.blogspot.com/2006/12/tevet-months.html>

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This week we read the last parshah in Bereshit. Bereshit is the book of beginnings. It tells of the beginning of the world and the beginning of the Jewish people. In both cases one could summarize the story very neatly by saying: In the beginning there was one. Then there were many. The way that the universe went from One inhabitant to many is the mysterious subject of Lurianic kabbalah. The way that the Jewish people went from being one to being many is the story of our ancestors.

Oneness is not a simple thing in our tradition. In the Shema we say, ADONAI ECHAD -- God is One. In the Aleinu we say BAYOM HA-HU YIHYEH ADONAI ECHAD U'SHEMO ECHAD -- on that day God will be One and God's Name will be One. God both is One and is not yet One. God is both Unity and Fragmentation, Everything and scattered shards yearning for each other. The word echad, with an aleph, means the digit one, singular. Yachad, with a yud, is "together." Yichud is what a couple does as soon as they leave the huppah -- they go into a room, with guards at the door, and they go from being two to being one. So oneness is a kind of a paradox -- it both excludes and includes. One can mean "only one" and it can mean "All is One." One can mean "this one as opposed to that one." And it can mean "all are One substance."

Abraham was one. God chose him alone from all the wandering semitic tribespeople of the earth. Abraham had two sons: Ishmael and Isaac. Abraham chose one. Isaac had two sons: Esau and Jacob. He chose one. In both the case of Ishmael and the case of Esau, they get more or less read out of the biblical story. Our lineage goes through the chosen child. The unchosen sibling is more or less forgotten, except for a few poignant appearances. Ishmael returns and, with Isaac, buries their father. Esau, duped, declines to take revenge on his trickster brother. The descendents of both unchosen brothers are recorded in Torah. They get mentioned occasionally. (The rabbinic tradition, by contrast, has much to say about Ishmael and especially Esau. They become monsters, Hitlers, the antecedents of Amalek, of Haman, of Nero. They are ostracized and monstercized. Not so in Torah.) After Jacob tricks Esau out of their father's blessing, Esau cries piteously, "Bless me too, Father!" But there is only one blessing. Isaac tells him, "Your brother came and took your blessing." "Have you but one blessing, Father? Bless me too, Father!" cries Esau again. "And Esau raised his voice and wept."

But this is not how Bereshit ends. Jacob -- Jacob of all people, the same Jacob who tricked his brother to heist the one blessing from his father -- breaks the chain. At the end of Bereshit Jacob blesses all of his sons, and two of his grandsons to boot. We are not all the child of Reuven, the firstborn; nor are we all children of Benjamin the lastborn. Esau's tragic question is never asked in the next generation: "Have you but one blessing, Father?"

Now being blessed as the twelve tribal leaders were blessed is no easy thing. Jacob, their father, describes each as he is -- not always gently. Still, each is seen. Each is recognized. Each is named. No echad is chosen. All go on to carry the legacy.

How in the world did Jacob, of all the unlikely candidates, become the innovator who was able to bless more than one son? I began to notice, as I was reading the latter part of Bereshit, that the children of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob began being called more and more by the name b'nai Yisrael -- the children of Israel. We all know that Yisrael, the name by which we are all called today, means "God-wrestler." We recall that Jacob, fleeing from Esau, in fact, encountered a "man," an angel, a something, and wrestled with this being until dawn. It was this man who renamed Jacob "God-wrestler." Something about that name caused me to go back and look at the place where it was first given. And, as I did so, I noticed something that I hadn't recalled. The anonymous wrestler realizes that Jacob is not going to give up. He wounds Jacob in the hip, as our translation euphemistically puts it, and then he says, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." And Jacob says, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The strange entity does, indeed, bless him. Immediately thereafter Jacob encounters the dreaded Esau, who welcomes him kindly, with the words, "I have plenty, my brother. Let what you have remain yours."

Why does Jacob ask for a blessing? He has already secured the blessing from Isaac. One chosen son. One blessing. But it is somehow incomplete. Jacob is a struggler, a wrestler, willing to take on even divine opposition. It's a mysterious interaction in many ways. One small mystery within the mystery is that bit about the blessing. We don't know its content. We don't know its consequence, except indirectly, by looking at the rest of Jacob's life. We don't even know exactly who gave it, though the name Yisrael, wrestler with El, is a clue. And after the whole ordeal is over, Jacob says, "I have seen the Divine face to face, yet my life was spared." But we do know this: at the moment when Jacob wrestled and became Yisrael, he learned that there was more than one blessing. He challenged that family myth which said that there was only one blessing worth having. He asked for another blessing, and he received it. Then he saw his brother, the supposedly unblessed one, who said, "I have plenty, my brother." Blessing enough.

Now years later, when Jacob is old and blind himself, it is his turn to extend his blessing to the next generation. And he blesses all of his sons. There is that strange moment when he asks for his grandsons, Menashe and Ephraim, to be brought to him. He crosses his hands to bless them, but bless them both he does. Strange, crosswise blessings, but blessing enough to go around.

Almost. There is one glaring omission in Jacob's largesse. And that is the absence of a blessing and a lineage for his daughter, Dina. Jacob, we are told, was wounded at the same time he learned about the great abundant flow of blessing. The wound was to the socket of his hip, an enigmatic phrase which later commentators connect with his ability to procreate, with his generativity. Now obviously Jacob has no problem bearing children. Ibn Ezra says that that wound was to future generations, and he points in particular to the catastrophe of Rome. I wonder if we might look at that wound to the generations slightly differently, as the ongoing wound to women, being healed in some measure in our own time? Jacob learned something crucial that night about how to wrestle down divine blessing. But he didn't learn it all. There was a wound, with painful consequences for his own daughter and for all the generations of b'not Yisrael to come.

Jacob went a long way in his lifetime from the oneness that excludes to the oneness that includes. But he didn't go the whole distance. There has continued to be more for the people of Israel to learn about receiving and passing on divine plenitude. We have more to learn about yichud, the oneness which expands and embraces, about shalom, which is whole, which is large enough to hold all the scattered fragments. There is something important in here about learning that lesson specifically from Esau, from the displaced, the unchosen, the villainized. But for now I simply want to honor our father Yisrael on the occasion of the parshah which tells of his death. Jacob learned to wrestle blessing, managed to thwart a family curse and bring that blessing to almost all of us, and then, through his two wounds -- the wound to his hip and the wound of being separated from his brother -- gave us the drive to extend his blessing still further towards wholeness.

<http://www.mcjc.org/mjoldart/MJAMH084.htm>

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Jacob's at it again. In Parshah Va-Yhi he's blessing Joseph's sons but he insists on favoring the younger boy. Joseph tries to correct him but Jacob is having none of it, insisting both will be great, but the younger will be greater: "Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh." (Gen. 48:20). Did you notice what happens next? If you answered, "*Nothing*," you're right, and that's what's significant. Throughout Genesis there have been rivalries among siblings, often with tragic results: Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Leah and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. Now, in spite of what might have been taken as a provocation, there is no indication at all of any enmity between Joseph's sons. Perhaps this is the true climax of the first book of the Torah, which we conclude this week. The siblings who will be our focus in future weeks -- Aaron, Miriam and Moses -- may have their differences but, in the end, they help each other as family.

<http://www.seventyfaces.com/dvar/64/my-weekly-drash-a-mini-d-var-torah-vayechi>

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**Yom Huledet Sameach**

Joan Price's grandson, Oren Rahav Nahum who turns 3 next Shabbat, and his first cousin, Ellaya Pauline Rahav, will turn 2 this Shabbat

**Refuah Shlemah**

Harvey Schrier [HHSCHRIER@aol.com](mailto:HHSCHRIER@aol.com)  
Lorraine Schottenfeld [HTSLS@aol.com](mailto:HTSLS@aol.com)

**Condolences**

Rachel Lavine, Robbie Kaplan and Jacob on the passing of Rachel's father, David Lavine  
[rachel\\_lavine@yahoo.com](mailto:rachel_lavine@yahoo.com)

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Quote of the Week

The majority of us lead quiet, unheralded lives as we pass through this world. There will most likely be no ticker-tape parades for us, no monuments created in our honor. But that does not lessen our possible impact, for there are scores of people waiting for someone just like us to come along; people who will appreciate our compassion, our unique talents. Someone who will live a happier life merely because we took the time to share what we had to give. Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have a potential to turn a life around. It's overwhelming to consider the continuous opportunities there are to make our love felt. Leo Buscaglia

Deep peace of the winter solstice to you.
Deep peace of the falling snow to you.
Deep peace of the love of friends to you.
Deep peace of the gentle deer to you.
Deep peace of the moon and stars to you. Author Unknown

Shabbat Shalom

Stacy

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